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SUBJECT: Disaster Declaration for Flooding in Fiji - This is an
Action Cable

Summary

1. Excessive rainfall and tidal surges on Fiji's main island of Viti Levu has caused the death of nine and displacement of an estimated 9,000 residents. The Government of Fiji (GOF) has declared a state of emergency and is enforcing a curfew to safeguard lives and property. Early assessments from response organizations indicate significant damage to infrastructure, agricultural production and water supplies. The Chief of Mission concurs that an adequate response is beyond the capacity of the Fijian Government and, through this disaster declaration, requests USG assistance to support the humanitarian response.

Background

2. Excessive seasonal rainfall compounded by tidal surges has caused the worst flooding in Fiji in at least a decade. Hardest hit is the western region of Viti Levu (Fiji's southern island) where flood levels in excess of 10 feet closed all major roads and airports. Weather predictions for the coming week include a strengthening low-pressure system and additional rain that will complicate an already precarious situation.

Current Situation

3. The GOF National Disaster Management Office reports nine dead and approximately 9,000 displaced due to the flooding. The Fijian Retailers Association reports damage to the commercial sector in the millions of dollars and the submersion of most of the country's important sugar cane crop. The displaced have evacuated to 114 shelters around the island and currently receive some food and non-food support from first responders. Local officials anticipate that continued rainfall expected this week will increase the number of displaced. Government health authorities are preparing for emerging typhoid and diphtheria cases due to deterioration of water quality.

Response

4. The GOF is providing evacuation assistance to populations in submerged areas. The Fiji Red Cross Society is distributing primarily non-food items to the displaced. International donors, including the Governments of Australia, New Zealand, and China, have contributed an estimated \$300,000 to response efforts by the interim government and non-governmental organizations.

Disaster Declaration

¶5. As Chief of Mission, I hereby declare that a flood disaster exists in the western regions of Viti Levu caused by the unseasonable rainfall and excessive ocean surges, and request that USG international assistance funding be made available to assist the affected populations. The Government of Fiji is not able to adequately respond to the population's emergency needs but is willing to accept international assistance, and it is in the interest of the United States to provide help. Based on local assessments, Embassy requests \$50,000 in International Disaster Assistance to support non-food and emergency water activities through the Fiji Red Cross Society.

McGann